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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000544

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: NLD MAKES "SUGGESTIONS" (CONDITIONS) FOR PARTICIPATION IN CONVENTION

REF: A. RANGOON 514

[B](#). RANGOON 481

[C](#). RANGOON 472

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: For the first time in a year the NLD CEC met this week as a full group, including detained leaders ASSK and U Tin Oo. Over the course of two private sessions, facilitated by military intelligence, the party leadership formed a series of "suggestions" that the SPDC must take on board in order for the NLD to attend the upcoming National Convention. Among their demands, the CEC insists on the release from house arrest of ASSK and U Tin Oo, the reopening of all NLD offices, and a timetable for the regime's road map. Party leaders also seek to have their long-standing procedural concerns regarding the Convention addressed in a dialogue between ASSK and regime leaders. Although NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe says if the regime agrees to NLD suggestions the party will attend the Convention, the free CEC members led us to conclude that the NLD may be considering attendance as a tactical move and they harbor few expectations the process will involve meaningful political dialogue. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) With two weeks remaining before the SPDC reconvenes the National Convention ("adjourned" since 1996), Rangoon has over the past week been the scene of intense deliberations among political opposition party leaders and, by some accounts, negotiations with regime envoys on conditions for participation in the Convention. (Note: The National Convention is scheduled to reconvene on May 17, but registration for delegates begins on May 14. End Note)

Reunited

[1](#)3. (C) On April 27, the SPDC allowed all nine members of the NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) to convene and discuss party matters. The two-hour session included General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and Vice Chairman U Tin Oo,

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both detained under house arrest, and took place at ASSK's lakeside house in central Rangoon. Military intelligence approved the meeting and arranged for the transfer of U Tin Oo from his house, but permitted the CEC to hold their discussions in private. According to NLD Secretary U Lwin, the CEC, convening for the first time as a whole in almost one year, met for about two hours but came to no resolution on participation in the National Convention.

[1](#)4. (C) The entire NLD CEC met again on Thursday April 29, under the same conditions as on April 27, and their internal discussions lasted for over five hours. P/E chief and visiting desk officer-designate met on April 30 with all seven of the "free" CEC members and discussed recent developments.

Might We Suggest...

[1](#)5. (C) According to Chairman U Aung Shwe, "two days was sufficient" for the NLD leadership to meet and develop a party position on attendance at the National Convention. Although the CEC members were cautious about revealing details of their internal discussions, they said that the NLD had prepared a list of "suggestions" for the SPDC to consider. The NLD leaders studiously avoided using the term "conditions," but insisted that the regime needed to agree to all of the NLD suggestions in order for the party to attend the upcoming Convention.

[1](#)6. (C) U Aung Shwe and party spokesman U Lwin said that, at a minimum, the regime needed to release ASSK and U Tin Oo, open all NLD party offices closed since May 2003 (note: a total of 210 offices), and provide a timetable for the "road map to democracy." CEC member U Nyunt Wei added that the NLD insisted all offices be reopened because with only the Rangoon headquarters in operation, "we (the NLD) are merely a head without a tail."

[1](#)7. (C) We raised with the CEC members their statement of

April 16 (ref C) which laid out the party's specific demands and grievances with regard to procedural issues at the Convention as well as the reasons for their departure from the last Convention in 1995. U Aung Shwe would not characterize these issues as "conditions" or "suggestions" in the context of their current position, but said that the party believed they must be the topic of discussion between ASSK and regime leaders before the Convention reconvenes.

18. (C) "If they agree (to our suggestions), we will go to the Convention," U Aung Shwe said, characterizing NLD demands as reasonable. However, the Chairman also said that he had no basis to determine how the regime would respond and observed that the SPDC's overall plan for a transition was more like a "road block" than a "road map." He added that the NLD CEC had no immediate plans to meet again as whole and would only do so once the SPDC is prepared to respond to the NLD position. The Chairman did not identify specifically how they had communicated their new position to the regime, but intimated that ASSK would soon meet with regime representatives.

Those Who Help and Those Who Don't

19. (C) U Lwin expressed frustration with members of the international community ("except the U.S.," he added) that continued to try and pressure the NLD to attend the National Convention. He said that some countries had approached the party to ask, "You wanted a dialogue, now why are you hesitating?" U Lwin, visibly angry, said that the NLD represented the majority of Burmese and had every right to demand concessions from the junta.

110. (C) U Lwin also said that some countries had intimated that the NLD, by prolonging the political stalemate, was somehow responsible for the suffering caused by international sanctions. "We have suffered for sixteen years under the SLORC and SPDC regimes," he said, "sanctions can not be blamed for the (junta's) actions; you (who impose sanctions) should not retreat because the pressure doesn't cause any more suffering than we already experience." (Note: We informed the CEC members that legislation had been introduced in Congress on April 29 to extend the U.S. import ban and they nodded with satisfaction. End Note).

111. (C) In response to our inquiry about any possible role for countries in the region, U Nyunt Wei identified ASEAN as "part of the problem." He observed that few among the ASEAN countries adhered to democratic principles and many had vested interests with the current Burmese regime. He noted that UN Special Envoy Razali had encouraged the NLD to "turn a new page" but he, U Nyunt Wei, opined that the NLD had no more pages to turn. U Aung Shwe dismissed Thai efforts to bring the GOB to the table with some members of the international community and said that the "Bangkok Process has nothing to do with us (in the NLD)."

Comment: A Tactical Move

112. (C) The seven elderly NLD CEC members appeared healthy and relaxed, despite what they described as a long week of discussions and developments. Although international press reports have described NLD leaders as optimistic about attending the National Convention, the free CEC members declined to make any prognosis on the regime's response to their most recent demands. However, Chairman U Aung Shwe was adamant that the NLD would not repeat the 1993 experience in which party delegates attended the Convention while ASSK was under house arrest. Although U Aung Shwe concluded that if the regime agrees to NLD suggestions the party will attend the Convention, his comments, and those of his colleagues, on the regime's road map led us to conclude that the NLD may be considering attendance as a tactical move and they harbor few expectations the process will involve meaningful political dialogue. End Comment.

Martinez